Emotional Manipulation and Logical Fallacies in Thanatological Discourse

By J. Martin Strangeweather

The most famous spokesperson for the life-after-death argument is arguably Dr. Raymond Moody who popularized the subject of near-death experiences in 1975 with the publication of his book *Life After Life*. Rather than explore Dr. Moody's concept of life after death, which is fairly straightforward and mostly grounded in accounts of near-death experiences, I have decided to scrutinize the very words and strategies he uses to defend his stance, drawing upon his latest interview at the time of this writing: *What if our Minds Already Know About the Afterlife? Dr. Raymond Moody on Proving Life After Death*, which you can find on YouTube [see below]. The interview was conducted by Dani Foffa, Multimedia Director of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS), and took place on October 31st at the 2025 IANDS conference.

In this 25-minute interview Dr. Moody ridicules disbelievers of life after death 20 times, referring to critics of the disembodied afterlife as ignoramuses, crazy, morons (the most commonly used expression of derision in the interview, employing it 5 times), nincompoops, foolish, obnoxious, goofballs, irresponsible, adolescent, uneducated, and immature. Dr. Moody also commits the 10 most common logical fallacies throughout the interview: 1. Attacking the person rather than criticizing their argument (ad hominem). 2. Creating a distorted version of the opposing argument and then criticizing it (straw man). 3. Appealing to authority. 4. Taking an argument from a sensible premise to an unsensible conclusion (slippery slope). 5. Arguing that something is good because it is popular (bandwagon). 6. Implying an argument must be true if it cannot be proven false, or false if it cannot be proven true (appeal to ignorance). 7. Presenting an issue as having only two sides, when in fact there are other alternatives (false dilemma). 8. Overgeneralization, or making hasty conclusions based on insufficient evidence. 9. Redirecting the issue to a different, irrelevant topic (red herring). 10. Appealing to tradition. Rather than take my word for it, let's take the words of Dr. Moody himself:

At 1:51, Dr. Moody claims "One of the main questions they [the ancient Greek philosophers] were investigating was life after death." While Philosophers like Plato did discuss the concept of an afterlife and the immortality of the soul, the primary foci of ancient Greek philosophy were much broader, exploring fundamental questions of epistemology, ethics, and logic.

At 2:34, Dr. Moody says, "If someone brings up a real objection, then I will be moved closer to understanding the truth, but if there aren't any real objections then that gives me some degree of confidence that I'm on the right track, but not complete confidence." Dr. Moody emphasizes the word real both times in this sentence, which raises the question of what criteria he employs to determine if an objection is real or not. The reasoning here is circular: objections are only real to him if they coincide in some way with that which he has already accepted as real.

At 3:00, Dr. Moody employs an ethos-based strategy: "I know all of the classical objections. I've studied philosophy since I was 18 years old."

At 3:12, Dr. Moody says, “To call life after death a scientific question in 2025 sounds nice because people like that word *science* but it has no cognitive content.” He never explains why the scientific position has no cognitive content, and I can confidently say that no one who calls life after death a scientific question does so because they like the word *science*. His statement is condescendingly dismissive of opposing views.

At 5:05, Dr. Moody claims, “Where we are now is that we're making sense of the notion of an afterlife in a whole new way because we have new logical techniques for us to analyze the concept more accurately.” Notice the use of we and us. This is an example of the bandwagon argument. He never explains what these “new logical techniques” are.

At 6:03, Dr. Moody commits the logical fallacy of appealing to authority, “...the personnel are divided into the doctors who study it and take it seriously, and then on the other hand the so-called skeptics.”

At 6:18, Dr. Moody makes the bold claim, “Well, the so-called skeptics, I could prove very quickly are ignoramuses.” Employing overgeneralizations and name-calling seems ill-fitting for someone with a PhD in philosophy and psychology.

At 6:38, Dr. Moody says, “I love to teach Greek philosophy, and when I get to Pyrrho, who was the founder of the skeptical movement, I have to undo the damage on my students minds that those utter morons have done.” This is an example of a red herring. He seems to be making an argument about the correct terminology one may use to identify themselves as a skeptic, which really isn't the issue here. The argument has shifted from the scientific questioning of life after death to the appropriate use of the word skeptic as an identifier.

At 6:55, Dr. Moody says, “They [the people who identify themselves a skeptics] have no idea what being a skeptic is... it's just a word to them which they have rallied around [note the hasty generalization], many of them are uneducated, they're entertainers, like magicians and so on who think they know everything.” This is an example of an ad hominem argument, attacking the education level of his critics rather than their specific arguments, and I’m sure there are just as many uneducated people who believe in life after death, if not significantly more.

At 9:20, Dr. Moody says, referring to modern-day skeptics “...the words that you hear from these utter morons, which they really are,” then in a mocking tone he portrays a modern-day skeptic, “I'm a skeptic about these near-death experiences. I think it's just the chemistry of the brain, which means I am a person who does not draw conclusions and my conclusion is that near-death experiences are the chemistry of the brain... that is a self-contradiction, and the main thing I want to say to these moron skeptics is read up a little bit [again equating skeptical with unknowledgeable]. It is a very adolescent mindset, many of them are very immature.”

Immaturity would be calling everyone who disagrees with your position on a complex subject a moron. This passage contains an example of a straw man argument. Moody seems to dismiss the numerous movements of skepticism since the passing of Pyrrho, speaking as if there is only one way to understand and practice skepticism. He believes "true" skeptics never draw conclusions, which seems to be the bulk of his argument. This is an example of a false dilemma, speaking as if there is only one conclusion to be drawn. Dr. Moody fails to distinguish the difference between scientific skepticism, which tends to involve exposing pseudoscience, and philosophical skepticism, which tends to involve suspending judgement, though not necessarily denying all truth.

At 10:15, Dr. Moody claims, "Humanism is a religion for people who want to be against religion, and about Pyrrho, none of them, I've asked a lot of them, is Pyrrho up here, they have no idea who I'm talking about, so what that means is they're ignoramuses." This is a blatant mischaracterization of humanists and oversimplification of humanism. And calling oneself a skeptic without knowing anything about Pyrrho does not make one an ignoramus. Most likely it just means one employs methodologies of modern-day scientific inquiry.

At 10:37, Dr. Moody says, "I love to teach about Pyrrho, and when I get to Pyrrho, these students they have no idea what the word [skepticism] means because of these magicians, very often uneducated magicians... there's a certain kind of obnoxious character that comes with that group, and they're very adolescent..." More ad hominem argumentation and overgeneralized discrimination.

At 11:17, Dr. Moody says, regarding people who call themselves skeptics without knowing the specific philosophy of Pyrrho: "...to approach a problem like life after death, without even knowing what the word [skeptic] means that you're using is irresponsible and crazy." It's also irresponsible to label everyone who differs from your understanding of skepticism as crazy.

At 12:05, Dr. Moody asserts, "My point here is that this is such a rich heritage [skepticism] and that these goofballs and morons who use often second-level scientists or engineers, entertainers, or just obnoxious people..." More ad hominem attacks. So far there hasn't been any mention of the "new logical techniques" that were alluded to earlier in the interview.

At 12:28, Dr. Moody makes an appeal to tradition: "Change your name [rather than call yourself a skeptic]. Don't complicate things for people who love to read Greek philosophy [by calling yourself a skeptic if you haven't read Pyrrho], you're foolish if you do that because these nice folks whose names you are taking in vain are a big part of the Western philosophical heritage, and it's only nincompoops who use a word when they don't know what it means."

At 13:08, Dr. Moody says, “I've loved Pyrrho since I was 18 years old, and to hear all these morons use the word [skepticism]... is crazy. And it's a great disservice to people who are genuinely interested in the intellectual life for those entertainers who are not educated, and second-level scientists to form an organization around a word that they don't even know what it means.” It would be helpful if Dr. Moody defined what constitutes a second-level scientist. The argument has moved into an emotional appeal, asking us to believe that calling oneself a skeptic without identifying as neo-pyrrhic is “a great disservice to people who are genuinely interested in the intellectual life.” A few minutes later, Dr. Moody says, in relation to religious people who think they have all the answers, “You know, I don't know much of anything.”

At this point the interviewer reminds the audience that Raymond Moody famously coined the phrase “near-death experience” in 1975, failing to mention that almost a century earlier, in 1896, Victor Egger coined the term “experience of imminent death” to describe life reviews, tunnels of light, time dilation, and other phenomena that climbers said they experienced during falls from great heights. What are we to make of this selective omission of information?

At 20:28, Dr. Moody claims, “In reality, Dani, you can't understand the notion of an afterlife till you understand the role it played in Greek philosophy because the system of reason and logic that you and I are using at this very moment was developed by Greek philosophers and one of the main questions they were testing it on was the question of life after death.” This is an example of a slippery slope argument, where the conclusion doesn’t follow from the premise. The “logic” of Dr. Moody’s statement goes something like this: if you want to understand the afterlife you must understand Greek philosophy because Greek philosophy underpins logic and logic is what we’re using now.

At 21:00, Dr. Moody says, “Whenever we start investigating the afterlife, we're reasoning in a circle, so you got to get out of that,” which sounds odd coming from a man who spent a significant portion of his life investigating the afterlife.

At 24:30, Dr. Moody makes an appeal to ignorance: “The logic of unintelligibility may very well give us rational proof of an afterlife.” Suffice it to say the short interview is rife with emotional manipulation and logical fallacies. Dr. Moody fails to provide any proof of life after death during this discussion, contrary to the title of the interview.

Foffa, Dani, interviewer. *What if our Minds Already Know About the Afterlife? Dr. Raymond Moody on Proving Life After Death*. International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS), 31 Oct. 2025. YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pb21SEZgXnY